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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2009

In Today's Papers

Talabani to Gul: The U.S. Will Disarm The PKK If There Is An Amnesty Law (Sabah)
Mainstream Sabah carries an interview with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who told the paper, "If The PKK Gets Amnesty, The U.S. Will Disarm Them." In addition, he said, "In April, all Kurdish groups will come together for a meeting in order to call for disarmament." Talabani said "I think the PKK will accept this call to all Kurdish parties. It will be an important step. I hope Turkey would later take measures to persuade them to come down from the mountains." Talabani also issued a message to PKK saying "the period of armed struggle has ended but the period of political struggle has begun."

Finance Ministry Freezes Dogan Media Group Shares
Media outlets report the Finance Ministry has frozen shares in Dogan Media Group's (DMG) Dogan TV company. The freeze came following the Finance Ministry's rejection of DMG's offer of shares from Kanal D and Star TV as "collateral" for a USD 534 million tax fine. Mainstream Sabah says that according to the law, cash, credit letters issued by banks, Treasury bonds and immovable property are accepted as collateral by the tax office. The tax office, however, has the authority to make their own decisions on different guarantees offered by taxpayers.

President Gul and President Talabani Hold Bilateral Talks on Sidelines of World Water Forum
Mainstream Vatan reports that Presidents Gul and Talabani met in Istanbul at the World Water Forum. Papers report Gul said the two countries should take advantage of ways to cooperate with each other and he told Talabani "we will share happiness if we act rationally; we will share sorrow if we don't act accordingly." Islamist oriented Zaman reports that the two leaders did not discuss details of Gul's upcoming visit to Baghdad.

Al-Qaeda Alarm in Turkey
Mainstream Sabah cites intelligence reports that indicate the new Al-Qaeda leader Mohammed Al-Gazawi infiltrated into Turkey to launch Gaza revenge attacks against Israeli interests in Turkey. It is

believed that Gazawi, who changes appearances often, is staying in a cell house connected to the terror organization.

5 Detained After More Human Bones Were Uncovered in 'Death Well' Excavations in Sirnak

Media outlets report five people were detained after the discovery of 20 human bone fragments in excavated wells near the village of Kustepe in Cizre in the province of Sirnak. Former Cizre Mayor and head village guard, Kamil Atak, is also being sought in connection with the investigation. Liberal Radikal reports an informant testified that in the 1990s, Atak used the Hezbollah organization in Turkey to interrogate and kill those who were suspected of aiding the PKK. According to the informant's testimony, Hezbollah buried the people they killed near Kustepe. The informant, who helped the prosecutor find the bones, said the Kustepe village was used by Hizbullah for training. Excavations were made in the pits known as "Death Wells" in Sirnak last week. Papers reported parts of a human skull, burnt clothes and bones were found in the excavations despite claims that some of the wells were 'cleaned up' after the excavations were announced 10 days prior to the diggings.

A cartoon in today's leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet depicts Justice hogtied and prepared for execution by the sword. Cumhuriyet's Ankara Bureau Chief, Mustafa Balbay, currently faces charges in the Ergenekon coup plot case, so the paper is clearly expressing its views that the AKP government's Islamist roots are threatening the judiciary.

Editorial Opinion on Mustafa Balbay Diaries and Ergenekon Trial

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Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "Journalist Mustafa Balbay was obviously involved in plotting a coup, along with some army generals. Before organizing solidarity events to protest Balbay's detention, members of the media should think first about their ethical standards."

Mehmet Yilmaz wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "Even though it is inappropriate for a journalist to talk about ways to overthrow the government, Mustafa Balbay's diaries also indicate he was planning to write a book about these developments. And we must remember the basic legal philosophy 'innocent until proven guilty' because these are notes coming from a website, not from an official court document."

Protestors Deported after Demonstration at The World Water Forum Sabah reports that two protesters were deported after holding up a banner during the opening ceremony of the 5th World Water Forum on Monday. As Turkey's President Abdullah Gul opened the forum, Ann-Kathrin Schneider of Germany and Payal Parekh of the United States, members of the nongovernmental organization International Rivers, expressed their disapproval of the Ilisu Dam project in Southeast Turkey with a banner reading "No Risky Dams."

The Armenian Lobby Isn't In Danger of Losing Their Jobs (Cumhuriyet)

Media outlets note two major developments regarding the Armenian Genocide issue - first that U.S. President Barack Obama may decide against using the word 'genocide' in his speech on April 24th, Armenian Remembrance Day. In addition, the AGR was officially introduced in Congress this week. Mainstream Hurriyet reports from an LA Times article published yesterday, "Obama could delay his genocide statement." Far Right Ortadogu reports, "Obama Is Hesitating on His Promises To Accept Armenian Claims." Mainstream Sabah reports, "The Genocide Resolution Is With Representatives in Congress," but the paper reminds readers, "In 2007, the Bush administration exerted efforts that succeeded in keeping the Congress from voting on the resolution." Mainstream Milliyet reports "The 'Armenian Genocide' Resolution Officially Enters the U.S. Congress," and notes, "The Armenian lobby in the U.S. is angered by Turkey's view of the events (of 1915) and has placed heavy pressure on President Obama to recognize the genocide claims." Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "It is likely that, due to the risk of losing Turkey's support for U.S. endeavors in the Middle East and other regions, Obama may delay his April 24th statement." Elcin

Poyrazlar of leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet comments that, in the midst of an economic crisis and rising unemployment in the U.S., "Armenians Are Not Unemployed."

Editorial Opinion: Afghanistan; Azerbaijan

Erdal Safak wrote in mainstream Sabah: "There is very dim hope for the future of Afghanistan since the current situation resembles the same situation eight years ago. Observers who know the regional realities well say it will take at least two more generations before Afghanistan can truly become stable. Currently, the Taliban is gaining more power and control. Additional forces from the U.S. and NATO will not change the negative direction in which Afghanistan is heading."

Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Azerbaijani President Aliyev is following a path cut by every authoritarian figure in the world. Today's referendum to extend the president's term to a lifetime term is a mistaken approach and there are great political risks for the future of Azerbaijan if the referendum passes."

TUBITAK Editor Keeps Her Post after 'Darwin Censor'
Media outlets report Turkish science board TUBITAK said Cigdem Atakuman, the editor of popular science journal Science and Technology, was not removed from her post. TUBITAK board had "censored" several articles on Darwin in the March issue of the

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journal. Mainstream Milliyet comments "Atakuman had to be kept in her position in the face of strong reactions that came from the domestic and international circles."

Meanwhile, the opposition CHP lawmaker Mehmet Sevigen submitted a motion to the parliament, asking why the Natural History Museum in Ankara displaying fossils in support of Darwin's evolution theory was kept closed. The museum was closed for 'renovations' after the AKP came to power in 2002.

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- On March 18, Turkey marks the 94th anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli, which paved the way for the War of Independence and the foundation of the Turkish Republic.
- Interior Minister Besir Atalay says the population registration offices will work "day and night" to give voters new identification documents needed for the municipality elections.
- Energy Minister Hilmi Guler says assessments related to the first nuclear power plant to be constructed in Turkey will be submitted to the government after the elections.
- An F-4 military training plane crashed Tuesday near Altinekin town in the province of Konya, killing one pilot and injuring the other.

World

- Gazprom deputy chair Alexander Medvedev said Russia will not join the Nabucco Project, emphasizing they continued work on the South Stream project.
- Egypt seeks in Washington "relaxation" of the US conditions for Hamas to join an internationally recognized Palestinian government.
- The Taliban's Islamic courts start to function in northwestern Pakistan's Swat Valley.
- A survey shows one in every seven young Germans, or 14.4 percent, could be considered "very hostile to foreigners."

JEFFREY